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DE RUEHMU #0275/01 0371602
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5142
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

UNCLAS MANAGUA 000275

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SAN JOSE FOR FAS - KNISHIURA

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [EAGR](#) [ETRD](#) [NU](#)
SUBJECT: NICARAGUA ONE STEP CLOSER TO CAFTA RATIFICATION:
U.S. MEAT AND POULTRY INSPECTION SYSTEM DECLARED EQUIVALENT

REF: A. MANAGUA 0026

[1](#)B. MANAGUA 0256

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Denis Salgado, Nicaragua,s Director General of Animal and Plant Health, told Econoffs on February 2 that the Ministry of Agriculture (MAGFOR) has found the U.S. meat and poultry inspection system &equivalent8 to the Nicaraguan inspection regime. This essential step for entry into force of CAFTA-DR came after a whirlwind trip by six Nicaraguan inspectors to USDA headquarters and various meat and poultry facilities in the U.S. The trip was hastily arranged in an effort to clear the way for entry into force before March 1 (all requirements for which must be completed by February 16). While the Nicaraguan audit team reported some "deficiencies,8 they were satisfied overall. Salgado expected to send a letter formalizing the determination of equivalency at any time, although it is also possible that equivalency will instead be granted through a ministerial agreement. (MAGFOR is evaluating which is required.) Post extends its gratitude to FAS and the entire USDA team in Managua, San Jose, Washington, and several states for their efficiency, responsiveness, and professionalism in organizing a successful audit by MAGFOR inspectors. Hurculean efforts to pull together an audit agenda and fund travel of the Nicaraguan inspectors - all within three days - were a crucial contribution to the implementation of CAFTA-DR. USDA also deserves credit for deftly handling potential problems during the inspections. End Summary.

Something to Crow About
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[1](#)2. (SBU) Despite the GON,s inability to fund travel for the MAGFOR audit team and the difficulty of arranging the trip on very short notice, the Nicaraguans were able to assess USDA inspection procedures in a variety of settings. The audit team accompanied USDA inspectors at several beef, pork, and poultry processing plants in three states. According to USG sources and Salgado, most of the stops went reasonably well, and the overall determination of MAGFOR was to recognize the USDA meat and poultry inspection system as equivalent to Nicaragua,s own regime. Department of Agriculture officials who accompanied the MAGFOR personnel report that the Nicaraguans seemed &professional and not political.8 The reason for the lack of lead time in arranging the inspection tour was a joint USG and GON desire to meet all preconditions for CAFTA-DR by February 16, in order to qualify for entry into force on March 1. This hurdle has now been cleared. (Comment: Other preconditions, such as legislative action on Intellectual Property Rights and Penal Code reforms still remain, although

there remains cause for cautious optimism for meeting the February 16 deadline. See REFTEL Managua 0256. End Comment).

Inspectors Have Some Beefs

13. (SBU) The visits to the meat and poultry processing plants were not without problems. At a poultry facility in Georgia, there was miscommunication within the company about the level of access the audit team should have. The group was told the next day that they could return to the plant, but the Nicaraguans declined, saying they obtained enough information from their visit to a second plant in the area. While stops at two beef and one pork plant in Texas went well, a second pork facility that made sausage had a few regulatory compliance issues. The Nicaraguan auditors acknowledged that the USDA official acted appropriately to address the situation.

14. (SBU) The Nicaraguan auditors noted some differences between what the FSIS inspectors look for when they come to Nicaragua and what the inspectors in the U.S. plants look for. Salgado also mentioned factors, that in his view, give Nicaraguan inspectors more authority than their U.S. counterparts. The GON plans to write a report including a list of suggestions for improvements to the U.S. system. (Comment: MAGFOR sees these recommendations as constructive and they are not offering the report just to be critical. Perhaps this is a positive indication that MAGFOR takes its role in protecting animal and human health seriously. End Comment).

Will Nicaraguan Audit Herd Other CAFTA Countries to Action?

15. (SBU) Salgado indicated that MAGFOR's initiative in conducting an equivalency audit had elicited strong, negative reactions from the other CAFTA signatory countries, especially from the Honduran and Salvadoran Ministries of Agriculture. When asked what factors set Nicaragua apart in its more deliberative approach on the equivalency, Salgado suggested that his Central American counterparts, and their supervisors in government, have a "closer relationship with the private sector. Some are producers themselves." He also noted that Nicaragua set a precedent; other signatory countries are now taking action and planning to conduct similar audits of the U.S. meat and poultry evaluation system. TRIVELLI